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SUBJECT: LATVIA 2010 INCSR PART 1 DRAFT

11. (U) Below is Embassy Riga's draft of the 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Part 1.

Begin INCSR Report:

II. Summary

As in previous years, the most widely used drug in Latvia was cannabis, followed by synthetic drugs such as ecstasy and amphetamines. Although relatively few drugs are produced in Latvia, criminals involved in the illegal drug trade use Latvia as a transit country. Unfortunately, budget constraints caused by the severe national economic crisis have decreased Latvia's ability to provide drug rehabilitation and prevention services. Latvia is party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

Cocaine use, although still relatively low, had apparently increased over the last few years. However, the volume of cocaine seized in 2009 is on pace to decrease for the second year in a row, perhaps indicating a reversal of this trend. Heroin use is also relatively low when compared to other substances, but by mid-2009 the volume of heroin seizures were already 14% higher than seizures in all of 12008. However, the overall volume of heroin seized in that time period remains below two kilograms and police report that heroin is usually sold at "retail" only to people known to the seller and is generally not available in public places, though selling tactics and methods constantly change. Amphetamines are distributed in venues that attract youth, such as nightclubs, discotheques, gambling centers and "rave" parties, but Latvian police have made a concerted effort to combat drug sales in those locations. Latvia itself is not a significant producer of synthetic drugs or their precursor chemicals, but officials believe that a significant quantity of diverted synthetics and their pre-precursors originate in neighboring countries and transit Latvia en route to other countries. Control of some cocaine smuggling through the Baltic region is directed by Latvian organized crime groups in coordination with other organized crime groups. Russia is the most likely ultimate market for this cocaine. Due to reductions in the health services budget, the government has closed some drug treatment programs and reduced the services offered in others. The government has also decreased funding for drug prevention programs

III. Country Action against Drugs in 2008

Policy Initiatives

Latvia completed an evaluation of its State Program for the Restriction and Control of Addiction and the Spread of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances for the years 2005 to 2008. The report concluded that the program was successful and authorities have managed to maintain stable control over drug use and trade, given the fact that the Latvian authorities could not influence external factors, such as the effects of joining the Schengen zone.

Government ministries prepared an Action Plan for the Restriction and Control of Addiction and the Spread of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances for 2009, which had the same priorities as the State

Program and was intended to guide Latvia's efforts until a new State Program could be adopted, but this short term plan was not adopted by the government. The government is currently developing a new State Program for 2010 to 2013, which the government plans to adopt next year.

In 2006 a program called "HIV/AIDS prevention and care among injecting drug users and in prison settings in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania" was initiated with UN funding. The goal of the project is to establish a favorable environment in all project countries to better implement HIV/AIDS prevention and care activities among injection drug users and in prisons. The program is scheduled to last from 2006 to 2010.

Peperzine, a new synthetic drug from Western Europe was added to the Latvian list of controlled substances in 2009.

Law Enforcement Efforts

Due to the economic crisis, the Latvian government cut the State Police budget, and significantly reduced the salaries of police officers. However, the number of personnel at the Latvian Central Criminal Police's Narcotics Combating Office has not changed.

Latvian law enforcement targets both street level drug dealers, through traffic stops and raids in nightclubs, and large international drug trafficking organizations through cooperation with the United States DEA and other nations. For example, in 2009 the Central Criminal Police concluded a 20-month investigation in which they worked in close concert with other European countries and Ecuador to target a drug smuggling conspiracy led by a major Latvian organized crime figure. In addition, in November of 2008 the State Police discovered the largest cannabis growing farm ever in Latvia, containing 1,905 cannabis plants.

Based on data from the first half of 2009, the volume of drugs seized by the Latvian police in 2009 generally is on pace to be significantly lower than in 2008. However, in the first half of 2009, Latvian police had already confiscated 14% more heroin than they did in all of 2008. Conversely, marihuana confiscations were less than six percent of the total confiscations in 2008, and hashish seizures were under 18% of 2008 levels. Cocaine, amphetamines, methamphetamines, and ecstasy, seizures in the first half of 2009 were, respectively, 5%, 42%, 15%, and 3% of the 2008 totals at the end of June 2009. However, the number of drug-related crimes in the first half of 2009 was on pace to meet or exceed 2008 levels.

Corruption

Latvia's Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) was established in 2002 to help combat and prevent public corruption. According to a KNAB official, the bureau has not uncovered any evidence of narcotics-related-corruption connected to high-ranking officials.

However, corruption generally remains a problem in Latvia and there have been narcotics related corruption cases involving relatively low-ranking government officials. For example, in 2009 KNAB asked prosecutors to bring criminal charges against a fellow prosecutor for accepting bribes from a person involved in narcotics distribution. This year KNAB also initiated criminal proceedings against a customs official at the Riga port for attempting to accept a bribe in return for not inspecting a container

As a matter of government policy, Latvia does not encourage or facilitate the illicit production or distribution of narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions.

Agreements and Treaties

Latvia is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by its 1972 Protocol. A 1923 extradition and a 1934 supplementary extradition treaty currently are in force between the U.S. and Latvia. The United States and Latvia are parties to a bilateral treaty on mutual legal assistance agreement which entered into force on September 17, 1999. The Republic of Latvia and the

United States have ratified an Extradition Treaty signed in Riga on December 7, 2005. Both governments have also ratified and exchanged instruments regarding the Protocol to the MLAT. Latvia is a party to the UN Convention against Corruption, and to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols against trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling and illegal manufacturing and trafficking in firearms.

Cultivation/Production

Latvia is not a major drug producing country, but relatively small amounts of drugs are produced in Latvia. Based on an increase in the number of cannabis growing operations discovered in Latvia, Latvian officials believe that the amount of cannabis grown in Latvia may have increased in the last few years.

Drug Flow/Transit

The drug transit situation in Latvia did not significantly change in the past year. Latvia is not a transit route for drugs destined for the United States. Most drugs transiting Latvia are destined for the Nordic countries, Russia or Western Europe. Criminals transport precursor chemicals for synthetic drug manufacturing, synthetic drugs, cocaine, ecstasy, and other drugs through Latvia. Heroin transiting Latvia is predominantly Afghan in origin and comes via the "Northern Route" through former Soviet Central Asia.

Criminals commonly drive synthetic drugs produced in Lithuania to Riga and then transport the drugs by ferry to Sweden. Benzyl Methyl Ketone (BMK), a synthetic drug chemical precursor, is produced in Russia and also transported through Latvia en route to other European destinations.

Local and foreign organized crime groups smuggle cocaine through the Baltic region, and some of it goes through Latvia en route to Russia. Latvian organized crime groups send cocaine hidden in commercial vessels from Guayaquil, Ecuador to St. Petersburg, and some groups drive vehicles with concealed cocaine overland from the Benelux countries to Latvia and Lithuania.

Latvia became a Schengen country on December 21, 2007, thus opening its borders to other Schengen Treaty states of the European Union. The Latvian State Police reported that the greatest rise in narcotics trafficking in Latvia occurred when it became an EU country in 2004. Police do not believe the change after Schengen accession has been significant.

Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction

The 2005-2008 national strategy addressed demand reduction, education, and drug treatment programs. Under that strategy the following objectives were achieved: establishment of a co-ordination mechanism for institutions involved in combating drug addiction (involving eight ministries); holding educational events for teachers and parents, as well as updated educational materials and informative booklets; inclusion of information on drug addiction in school curriculums; establishment of a pilot program for teaching prevention of drug addiction, alcohol abuse and smoking; pilot programs on drug addiction for local governments; education programs for members of the armed forces; and mechanisms for information exchange amongst relevant institutions.

Budget cuts threaten to reduce some of these programs. For example, in 2009 the national government stopped funding the Riga Addiction Prevention Center, which organizes drug education programs in Riga. The Riga City Council now funds the center, although at a reduced level.

Due to the economic crisis and the accompanying budget cuts, the Latvian government reduced the services offered by publicly funded drug treatment and rehabilitation programs. The government closed the drug treatment program in Rindzele, previously one of the largest in the country. The Riga Centre of Psychiatry and Addictions, the name of the State Narcotics Center since 2007, continues to offer a drug rehabilitation program, but the government reduced funding from a level that supported the care of 15 patients at a time to a level that only supports the care of two patients. Additional patients must pay 150 LVL (\$318) per month, a significant amount in Latvia. Government funded regional narcotics addiction

treatment centers in Jelgava, Daugavpils, Liepaja, and Straupe continue to operate. Private rehabilitation centers in Riga and publicly funded youth rehabilitation centers in Jaunpiebalga, Gailezers and Straupe also continue to operate.

2008 data on drug treatment clients show a modest increase in the number of patients treated at publicly funded in-or out-patient treatment programs. The number of those treated for the first time at out-patient treatment centers in 2008 increased by 5% compared to 2007 (659 in 2008 and 627 in 2007). Data show that approximately every fifth problem drug or injection drug user sought treatment in 2008. Preliminary analysis indicates that the number of those treated at in-patient programs has increased by the same percentage as out-patient programs. The number of patients treated in 2009 will probably decrease, given the reduced services offered by the publicly funded health care system.

Harm reduction programs are operating in Latvia. December 2006 a four-year UNODC project "HIV/AIDS prevention and care among injection drug and in-prison settings in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania" began. The programs focus includes substitution treatment and increased coverage of harm reduction activities. A local NGO manages syringe exchange centers, including a mobile exchange center, and provides psychological and social counseling to addicts.

Part IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives

Bilateral Cooperation

The United States offers assistance on investigating and prosecuting drug offenses and organized crime. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Latvia Central Criminal Police continue to conduct joint investigations in an effort to disrupt and dismantle Latvian-based organized crime groups that operate both regionally and internationally. In 2009 The DEA provided various training courses to Latvian law enforcement officials and USCG Mobile Training Team visited Latvia in 2009 to provide a course on advanced boarding.

Road Ahead

The United States will continue to pursue and deepen law enforcement cooperation with Latvia, especially in the area of money laundering and border control. The United States will also encourage Latvia to work with regional partners to advance the mutual fight against narcotics trafficking.

End INCSR Report